

Lake Ophelia

National Wildlife Refuge

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Dennis Sharp, Refuge Manager
Lake Ophelia NWR Complex
401 Island Road
Marksville, LA 71351
Phone: 318/253 4238
Fax: 318/253 7139
E-mail: r4rw_la.lop@4at~rww

Refuge Facts

- Established: 1988.
- Acres: 17,200.
- Location: Avoyelles Parish, central Louisiana.
- Other lands managed: FmHA conservation easements and fee-title transfers; 21 tracts, 2130 acres.
- Directions to headquarters: follow Louisiana Hwy 1 north from Marksville to Fifth Ward; turn left onto Louisiana Hwy 1194 at caution light; stay on Highway 1194, following signs, to headquarters building.
- Directions to refuge: follow Louisiana Hwy 452 northeast from Marksville, 22 miles to refuge.

Natural History

- Lake Ophelia NWR was once part of the large contiguous Mississippi River bottomland hardwood forest. During the seventies, much of the area that would become Lake Ophelia NWR was cleared for agriculture.
- Topography and flooding prevented profitable farming and the refuge was established in 1988. Habitat management objectives are centered around restoring hardwood forests and providing agricultural crops for wintering waterfowl.
- Underlying soils are the typical poorly drained, nutrient-rich clays associated with a large river floodplain. These soils are capable of supporting large numbers of resident and migratory wildlife. The refuge is named for Lake Ophelia, a 350-acre permanently flooded swale.

Financial Effects of Refuge

- Six-person staff.
- 20,000 visitors annually.
- Current budget \$454,000 (FW98).

Refuge Objectives

- Provide wintering habitat for migratory birds — particularly waterfowl.
- Provide habitat for threatened and endangered fish and wildlife.
- Restore and protect habitats capable of supporting a high diversity of native fish and wildlife.
- Provide opportunities for compatible fish and wildlife-oriented education and recreation.

Management Tools

- Water level manipulation.
- Cooperative farming.
- Bottomland hardwood reforestation.
- Mechanical/chemical control of noxious plants.
- Education/interpretation.
- Hunting.
- Feral animal control.
- Law enforcement.
- Partnerships.

Public Use Opportunities

Refuge is open daylight hours year-round.

- Wildlife observation.
- Photography.
- Hunting: small game, deer and waterfowl.
- Fishing.
- Walking trails.

Calendar of Events

January: archery deer hunting.

February: small game hunting with dogs.

May: Migratory Bird Day, Bowhunter Safety Course.

August: Bowhunter Safety Course.

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September: Bowhunter Safety Course.

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week, small game hunting.

November: archery deer hunting, youth gun deer hunting.

December-January: Christmas Bird Count, muzzleloader deer hunting, waterfowl, woodcock, and snipe hunting

Questions and Answers

When will the next bowhunter education course be taught?

The complex teaches three courses a year: one each in May, August and September.

Can lead shot be used for any hunt at Lake Ophelia NWR?

No. Only approved non-toxic shot can be used. Because the entire refuge is wetland and subject to flooding, the potential for waterfowl ingesting shot is high. Currently, only steel, bismuth/tin, and tungsten/steel shot are approved. Youth shotgun deer hunters may use lead buckshot.

Do I need to check out (fill out a hunt report card) even if I don't harvest any game?

Yes. The hunt report cards are the only way that the refuge has to collect important information such as hunter numbers, effort hours, and distance traveled to visit the refuge. This information helps us provide quality hunts.

Do I need a special permit to fish on the refuge?

No. A permit is not required to fish on either refuge, but it is recommended. The permit/brochure explains the regulations unique to the refuge.

When will Grand Cote NWR be open to crawfishing?

The opening date of crawfish season at Grand Cote NWR is variable, due to changes in water elevation and weather. Typically, the season runs from mid-April to mid-May. As soon as dates are selected, we will advertise in local papers and on local broadcasts.